UNIV. OF MD COLLEGE PARK
31430036356980

Maryland
Rare

E
458.2
.F523
1862

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

BY THE CHAPLAIN.

BALTIMORE:
PRINTED BY JAMES YOUNG,
No. 114 West Baltimore street,
1862.

Maryland Fair
E458.2
.F523
1862

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

The two armies were gathered in battle array. The prancing cavalry could scarcely be restrained. The artillerymen were at their guns, waiting for the order. The infantry were prepared to advance. Each heart beat with excitement. Every eye kindled. A flush was upon each cheek. The crisis long expected was at hand. But who is that solitary man who ventures on the intermediate space? Attention fastens on him as he descends the hill, and emerges from the thick pines. He bears aloft a *white flag*. He is the truce-bearer. Immediately the din of preparation is hushed. The musket rests upon the ground. The officers waive back the advancing column. The silence of peace pervades the battle-field. Yon white flag, tinged by the rays of the rising sun, furnishes a subject for the painter, and it furnishes an illustration for Christ's *ambassador*, as this day he beseeches you to be reconciled unto God.

There is a warfare between two great kingdoms. On one side the hosts of God are enrolled. The angels which excel in might. The glorious company of the Apostles. The goodly fellowship of

the Prophets. The noble army of Martyrs. The Holy Church throughout all the world. On the other side evil spirits range their numerous forces with every appliance of concentrated hate, and far reaching subtlety. In this warfare there is no *neutrality*. You must rank either as a friend or an enemy of God. Do you ask where is the enmity? Do you affirm that this hatred of Christ has disappeared before enlightened civilization? Yes, its *form* is more disguised; its *action* more refined. It does not discuss, but it practices atheism. The natural man is still enmity against God. See the desecration of God's day! The profanation of His name! The disregard of His minister! The spirit of anti-Christ enthroned in the heart is the same that kindled the martyr fires of Diocletian, and sentenced the Saviour with the cry, "crucify him." The most secret indulged sin is a violation of a law that never changes—a rebellion against a kingdom which is perfect in its power and justice. And what does God do? Does He crush at once, with lightning wrath, this resistance? No. He sends the minister of reconciliation. I come in His name with a message of mercy. I bear in my hand the flag of truce. I beseech you to lay down the weapons of rebellion; and I propose to you a suspension of hostilities against your offended Saviour.

Consider the *love* displayed in such an offer. In

wars between man and man, *weakness* sends the first proposition, but here Almighty power stoops to weakness. Infinite purity supplicates guilt. "Come now, and let us reason together," saith the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

See the manifestation of His love in the very *ambassador* He sends. He might have chosen for this important mission the same angel whose voice terrified the shepherds on Bethlehem's plain; but He chooses one of yourselves, with all the weakness, all the wants, and all the temptations which you experience. He places the treasure of His message in earthen vessels; the truce flag in hands which are weaponless. He would have you influenced not by the terrors of power, but by the convictions of reason, and the entreaties of love.

This truce is of the *most important character*. It is not sent that disease may be arrested, or that the life of your body may be preserved a few years longer. Its message is salvation of the never-dying soul; peace here, and peace hereafter. It saves from sin and makes you pure. It preserves from everlasting death, and gives you life eternal. It relieves you from spiritual poverty, and confers mansions with an inheritance unfading.

When Roderick's messenger bore the red cross to the Highland clansmen, the festivities of the

bridal ceased; the solemnities of the funeral were suspended,

> "The fisherman forsook the strand;
> The swarthy smith took dirk and brand,
> With changed cheer the mower blithe,
> Left in the half cut swathe his scythe;
> The herds without a keeper strayed,
> The plough was in mid-furrow stayed."

Shall the fiery cross prove so potent, and the *white* cross have no attraction? That heavenly radiance beamed upon the shepherds, and they at once left their flocks, and found in Bethlehem their new-born Saviour. A brighter light than theirs beams upon you. To your heart is presented the truce of God, intensified by Calvary and Olivet.

This *very locality* also makes its appeal. In the midst of war the *Hospital* becomes a truce ground which no enemy invades. From its flag the deadly missile turns away. The enclosure is privileged, but these *Wards* have a privilege far higher. Here affliction accumulates, and here Heaven's mercy descends. The sick bed allows that meditation so interrupted amidst the excitements of health: a salutary rest for the soul's inspection. A stream of sacred influence comes from public worship, instruction, conversation, books, and tracts. You have now an opportunity of calling on Christ which may never return. Thus near Heaven's gate, will you turn away? Sheltered and cared

for at this Inn, will you forget that *best* Samaritan whose providence brought you here? The intense whiteness of the snowy waste blinds the Arctic traveller, and these beams of mercy unimproved blind the moral vision. No Sabbath, Bible, Minister, or prayer—and then comes that appalling spectacle: the profound darkness of the Heathen, with the high responsibilities of the early trained Christian.

This message is designed for *each one*, for all have transgressed against their God. In ordinary wars one may be a mere spectator; gaze upon the scene with comparative indifference; but here the message is sent to your heart. Conscience says, "Thou hast sinned. Thou hast raised the arm of rebellion against God's majesty;" and equally personal is this offer from thy Maker. It assures you of your pardon. It declares, on your repentance, "The Lord hath put away thy sin." Yon ray of light which drives away the darkness, and pours its molten stream through your window, is not more personal than this illuminated message which penetrates the darkness of your heart.

And then consider that there is no *deception* in this emblem of truth. The white flag has often been used to gain time or information as to the position of a battery: and its bearer has not been allowed to enter the lines, unless blindfolded. But this truce flag covers no fraud. It comes from

God, who cannot either deceive or be deceived. "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the Son of man that He should repent; hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" The rising sun, the changing seasons, declare His veracity. The ruins of Nineveh, Tyre, Babylon, Jerusalem, proclaim His truth.

This truthful flag I bring to your heart. But while your lips are still, your thoughts seem to say, "This is an old message; I have been used to it from my boyhood; I am tired of its very familiarity." You mean to say that there is the highest mercy in a *single* offer, but when God spares you in the midst of provocations, when He sends to you *repeatedly* His minister, when He watches each changing opportunity to recall you, then mercies diminish. Is this really so? Is the mother less loving as she watches night and day over the cradle of her darling? Or is the father less merciful who looks year after year for his returning prodigal? Let nature speak! Ask yon sun if the repetition of his rays has diminished their brilliancy—and he will say that for *you* he shines with the splendor which waked the first morning of Paradise. But there is something yet more remarkable. The repeated beams of the sun of righteousness *increase* in their brilliancy. Each appeal to the rebellious heart is a *new* instance of

mercy. "We are the ancients," said a learned writer: "We have the accumulated experience of the remotest past—the testimony of the great original Himself;" and I may say with still more certainty, "this is heaven's *first* message to you; this is the *first* flag of truce from your Sovereign." Others, indeed, preceded this, but this has a fresh mercy—an increased responsibility which no other had. The banner has become whiter at each presentation, and this last which I bring you is the whitest of all. This *accumulated* mercy you never saw before; and when you come to yourself, when you come to know (as you may know) the infinite patience and condescension of a wounded Saviour, you will say, "this is news to me—I never heard it before." The mountains and hills which *always* sang shall, for *your* first time, break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands with joy.

Such is the offer I make you to-day; and what is your reply? Heaven's truce flag is brought to the gate of your heart, and what is your determination? Will you delay? Continue in rebellious defiance yet longer? Have you counted the cost? Have you an arm like His? Can you bid His waves "go back?" Can you arrest the progress of the disease, or make a compromise with death? Wisdoms stand without, and this last appeals with a *new* persuasion. Will you lay down your sinful arms, and from this moment surrender?

I have pronounced a word that is unpopular. Pride dislikes to descend. Intellect will not admit itself mistaken. "Surrender is humiliating, unmanly. It is cowardice." Such is its definition in earth's dictionary, but what says heaven's book? "The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God." To ask forgiveness, to confess that one is wrong, is true nobility. Did George Washington lower himself when, after a contested election in Alexandria, he went to a neighbor and begged his forgiveness for some hasty words he had spoken? Was the prodigal feeding swine when he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son?"

It is most honorable to ask forgiveness of a fellow man; and had Alexander begged pardon of Clitus, he would have gained a victory more illustrious than the triumph of Arbela. And how much nobler still to beg the pardon of *God*—to surrender before His majesty! David *elevated* himself when he confessed his criminality in that most touching 51st Psalm—and what a victory over Jewish prejudices did Saul achieve when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Such a surrender is your triumph. "In this Cross you conquer."

When the town of Derry was beleaguered, and the people were reduced to starvation, a brother

minister, George Walker, took the command, and wrote on his flag, "No surrender;" and at last relief came to turn their sorrow into joy. And so I say to the heart beset with temptations, "No surrender." Sacrifice everything. Lose thy right hand sooner than yield to sin, and be assured that God will send relief. Your enemies will be scattered, and you shall be cheered by angel comforters.

But your surrender to *God* is "no surrender." It is a triumph that tunes the angelic harps. A conquest whose laurels never fade. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Slighted by man, bidden to take the lowest seat, thy God shall say, "Friend go up higher."

And now let me appeal to your gratitude and to your interest. If God had merely *offered* you this mercy, you should be grateful—but what has He done? He hath made Him who knew no sin to be a sin-offering for you. The truce He proposes was purchased by the death of His beloved Son. It is procured by the repeated strivings of His spirit. You were bought not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. God *so* loved the world. Now where is gratitude? If there be a single pulse left, methinks it must throb as you see God's truce brought to your heart at such a cost.

And what says keen-eyed *interest* to this appeal? Interest wishes to be on the side of safety. It

seeks a government that protects its subjects. It wants a flag whose presence is security. Cannot interest be gratified? When Mr. Poinsett was the American Ambassador in Mexico, a serious riot occurred which threatened the lives of many people. Where should they seek protection? They sought Mr. Poinsett, and he, from the balcony of his hotel, unfurled the flag of his country, and its ample folds calmed that crowd like oil upon the stormy wave. But there is a flag unworn by the wind. There is a kingdom which cannot be moved. It has survived the wreck of Empires. Joseph sought its aid, and the pit did not cover him. Daniel relied on its protection, and the lion's mouth was closed—and no one ever sought the help of God in vain. Say "I am Heaven's citizen," and God will detail angel legions for your charge.

Now what say you? Will you slight this message? Do not, I entreat, commit so great a wrong. To injure, to slight an Ambassador, is a blow at his government. Louis Napoleon treated with coldness the minister of Austria, and that was the tocsin which called the two nations to bloody contest. And though he who offers you reconciliation in Christ's name, is weak and defenceless in himself, the Government that sends him is, for that very cause, the more sensitive to any slight he receives. He is weak that the excellency of his power may be from God.

Then from the gate of your heart let the emblem of surrender float. Wait for no one else. It is no treason to break wrong engagements, to return to the allegiance of your Baptism. If necessary, come *alone*, like Abdiel. Let them laugh and jeer; you shall be amply compensated by the smile of God, and by the recollection of your undaunted loyalty. You shall have one hundred fold in this world. What says self-interest of that percentage?

And then, as I have brought you this truce flag, awaking good resolutions, and sowing in your hearts the seeds of eternal life, let me know and rejoice over the harvest. I have come to you—come to *me*, and cheer me by your experience.

Banish that false shame which does not fear the presence of God, while it shrinks from the least betrayal of uneasiness before God's minister. Let me tell you more of this Truce, and of a *Feast*, upon your reconciliation. Christ Himself spreads His table for you, and there He is always present. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them; for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found."

U. S. HOSPITAL,
Patterson Park, Baltimore.
Sunday before Advent, 1862.

MARYLAND, RACE
E
458.2
.F523
1862